

# The Life of St. George

BY

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# **The Life of St. George**

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TO  
**The Royal Society of St. George**  
THIS TREATISE  
ON THE  
LIFE OF THE PATRON SOLDIER-SAINT OF ENGLAND  
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED  
IN TOKEN OF  
THEIR SUCCESS IN REVIVING HIS FESTIVAL, AND IN  
ADMIRATION OF THEIR NOBLE EFFORTS  
TO ENCOURAGE THE PATRIOTIC SENTIMENT  
OF ALL CLASSES OF  
ENGLISHMEN BOTH AT HOME AND BEYOND THE SEAS



*H.*  
*Cornelia Stikette Hildel*  
*4.17.1918*

THE first edition of this book having been exhausted, the Royal Society of St. George have decided to publish a new edition of the same, which has been carefully revised and enlarged by the author.

Great satisfaction is felt that this Life of our Patron Saint has already been so favourably received by the public.

It is a matter, too, of much gratification that since the first edition was brought out last year, His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to command that the English Patriotic Society of St. George shall henceforth be known and designated as the ROYAL SOCIETY OF ST. GEORGE.





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T. GEORGE, the tutelary saint of England, as well as the special patron of chivalry, was born in the third century at Lydda in Palestine.<sup>1</sup> He was of noble Christian parents of Greek origin. Lydda is situated in the fertile plain of Sharon, and was always an important town "embowered in verdure." Arabs call the green district around it "the Garden of Palestine." Lydda was the Greek name of the ancient Lod, and in the Middle Ages this town was for centuries called "St. George's." Under Syrian rule both the town and the district around belonged to Samaria, but were made over to Judea by Demetrius Soter (1 Maccab. xi. 34). In New Testament times we find there were saints dwelling there, and one of them named Aeneas, who had been paralysed eight years, was immediately healed by St. Peter, when all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

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The name George in Greek is Γεωργός ; in Latin, Georgius ; in Turkish, Djorge. The Orientals named him Mar Girgius or Jirias, and he was a favourite Saint in the Syrian Calendar. By the Moslems he is almost always designated El-Khudr, and is much esteemed by them. It is traditionally held that the Gate of Lydda will be the scene of the final combat between Christ and Antichrist. The Mohammedans have an idea that the soul of El-Khudr, a prophet, passed in succession into Phinehas, Elijah, and St. George. Some of the Jews regarded Phinehas and Elijah as one ; but the Mohammedans went still further (Sale, "Koran," ch. xviii. note *w*).

It is curious that even in the present day (Quarterly Statement Pal. Explor. Fund, Jan., 1901, p. 71) both Christians and Mohammedans in Palestine make vows to St. George in case of danger or great distress. The persons who make the vows address St. George as "Evergreen Green One" (probably in allusion to his having been a native of Lydda). They and their friends then march, singing all the way, to the Church of St. George, and there sacrifice a lamb.

It is unfortunate that the life history of this saintly martyr has been absurdly mixed up, even by

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the historian Gibbon, with that of the Arian George of Cappadocia, who lived more than half a century later, became by fraud Archbishop of Alexandria, and turned out so great a villain that he was lynched by his own people, and his body cast into the sea. As Hepworth Dixon said, "We have had two Georges in history, and, to our shame, we have made them one." Besides the palpable improbability of thus confounding them, any such assumed identity has been effectually disposed of by such a fact as that Constantine the Great dedicated a church to St. George the Martyr at Constantinople A.D. 330; and there is also a ruined church at Ezra, in Syria, with a Greek inscription of the year 346, in which St. George is called "Holy Martyr." Now the infamous George of Cappadocia was slain 362.

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Hepworth Dixon has also said of the true St. George of England: "For six hundred years we have borne his banner of the red cross into every corner of the globe; we have placed his badge on the noblest breasts; we have kept his day as our special feast; we have given his name to the most regal chapel in our land; we have dedicated to him a hundred churches; and while we have been doing all these things in his honour we have been indo-

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lently content to allow our greatest historical writer to describe him as one of the lowest scamps and darkest villains who ever stained this earth with crime " ("The Holy Land," ch. lx.).

Sir Walter Scott, too, scouted the idea that these two St. Georges were one and the same, for in "Count Robert of Paris," chapter ii., he makes the English Hereward, one of the Varangian body-guard of the Emperor, say to his Greek captain, "By good Saint George of Merry England, worth a dozen of your Saint George of Cappadocia." . . . He, therefore, did not agree with Gibbon, whose personal bias in such matters is well known.

Yet it must be confessed that the life history of the true St. George is very obscure. What may be definitely relied on, in brief, is that he was born at Lydda of noble parents, who were Christians, that he became a distinguished soldier, a man of great courage, and a tribune. For a time he was a great favourite of Diocletian, but on complaining to that Emperor of the severities towards the Christians, and boldly testifying to his own faith before him, he was put to death on April 23, 303, at Nicomedia. Perhaps one reason for the obscurity as to any details of his life may presently be shown. However

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it may be, as Rev. S. Baring-Gould says in his "Lives of the Saints," few saints have received such universal recognition as St. George. By the Greek Church this noble soldier and Christian martyr has received the names of *Μεγαλόμενυρ* ("great martyr"), *Τροπαιοφόρος* ("trophy-bearer"), and *Αθλοφόρος* ("the victorious"). But no records are extant of either his valorous deeds in war, his magisterial decisions as a tribune, or his wisdom in counsel, which rendered him so great a favourite and trusted adviser in imperial court circles. Until the time approached for his martyrdom very little is known of his history. May it not be permissible to fill up what is wanting by most reasonable conjectures, guided by such side lights as may be afforded here and there?

As to his deeds in war it is evident that he must have accompanied Diocletian through his brief Egyptian campaign in 295, and Galerius in his Persian war, which lasted two years, ending 298. When these wars were over he would seem to have been residing at Berytus or Beirût (about which place more presently) as a wealthy patrician and tribune of the people. Whilst there it is fair to presume that Diocletian sent him on an expedition to Britain, which, after a brief independence, had been re-conquered and

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restored to the Empire ; and where at that time were Constantius (another joint-emperor, and father of Constantine the Great) and Helena, his wife, who is said by some to have been born in Britain. Constantius had taken up his residence at Eboracum (York), having been called to the north to repress the turbulence of the Picts and Scots. He died at York in the year 306. In order to reach there, St. George would doubtless sail through the Oceanus Hibernicus, or Irish Channel, subsequently known as St. George's Channel, and he must have landed at Portus Sistuntiorum, which was then the only port in that part of the coast of what was subsequently called the County of Lancaster. It may well be assumed that it was then, and through his instrumentality, that the Empress Helena was converted to Christianity, and, through her, her son Constantine, whereby the course of the whole Roman world in matters of religion was changed, and Christianity began to take the place of Paganism. Thus symbolically was St. George the means of destroying the dragon of heathen idolatries. Whilst here, too, he would take a warm interest in the inhabitants of Britain, whose characteristics would win his admiration, and many of whom he doubtless induced to become Christians.

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Now appeared a dark cloud on the horizon, for it was just at this time that Diocletian, instigated against his will by his son-in-law, Galerius, issued his edict against Christianity, and ordered the persecution of those holding the Christian faith. The first martyr of Britain was St. Alban, the time of whose death has been variously put between 283 and 305, but is not at all likely to have been before this time, 301. St. George would now hasten back in order to make every endeavour to put an immediate stop to these persecutions, by reason of his great influence with Diocletian. On arriving at Beirût and learning all about the terrible massacres which were going on in all directions, and especially in Thessalonica, his indignation would know no bounds. It is recorded that when he was twenty years of age his mother died and left him a large fortune. He is said to have now distributed his money to the poor and determined to go at once to Diocletian himself, of course at the immediate risk—indeed, humanly speaking, the absolute certainty—of losing his own life. He went outside Beirût on horseback, clad in armour, and then and there declared immediate and open war against these tyrants and all forms of heathen idolatries. It was at this very spot that the:

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fable of St. George and the Dragon took its origin, its real and obvious significance being the coming triumph of Christianity over Paganism. A ruined tower near this city still marks the site of the legendary conflict. The beautiful bay, on the south side of which, on a projecting point, is situated the city of Beirût, is to this day called St. George's Bay. The city has always been a very fine one, and was of such importance in the third century that students flocked from all countries to the celebrated Roman School for the teaching of law, especially as applied to mercantile affairs. A writer in the "Quarterly" for October, 1846, says: "This same Berytus, the metropolis of ancient law, abounded not only in law but also in merchandise, as innumerable traders were attracted thither by the fame and plenty of Tyrian purple."

It may here be mentioned that, according to some authors, there was in ancient times some strange connection between Beirût (Berytus or Berith) and Britain. Certain it is that in Hebrew the name (ברית, *Brit*), which means "Covenant," is the same for both. Probably there were great commercial advantages from the intercommunication between our island and this important Phoenician city with its great maritime



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power ; the two uniting to form the confederation of the *Brettii* for the promotion of commerce and agriculture. The ancient coins of Beirût had upon them the trident, which still figures upon the English penny.<sup>1</sup>

After this little digression we may follow St. George to Thessalonica, which was the western capital of Diocletian, who had built a magnificent palace there ; for it was in this city that Christians specially abounded, and where the massacres were being carried on most fiercely. Thessalonica, indeed, was long the bulwark of Oriental Christendom, and received the designation of "the Orthodox City." The principal martyr at that time was St. Demetrius, who ever since has been the Patron Saint of Thessalonica. ||

In 1896 I came into possession of an ancient and very interesting Greek manuscript of sixteen pages, which had just then been discovered in exploring Pergamos. It is written alternately in prose and poetry, the peculiarity of the latter being that it not only scans correctly, but also rhymes. Its sentiments, too,

<sup>1</sup> In the Royal Exchange there is a magnificent painting representing "Phoenicians trading with the early Britons on the coast of Cornwall." It was painted and presented by the late Lord Leighton, P.R.A., in 1895. There are seen beautiful specimens of Phoenician purple garments, costly rugs, precious stones, and pottery.

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are exceedingly beautiful. It gives a full account of the martyrdom of St. Demetrius, and of other important circumstances connected with it. From this Greek document, which I have translated, it appears that Bacchus was chiefly worshipped at Thessalonica, and had a fine temple there. It is well known that Macedonia had always been famous for its wines. Demetrius openly refused to burn incense to this god, and boldly preached Christ. Galerius had taken up his residence in this city at that time, and ordered him to be hacked to death with swords. His devoted followers, who were numerous, expressed some oil from his hacked body, which they had rescued, and placed it in a jar as a sacred relic of this Christian martyr. From this the name "Myroblete" was given to Demetrius. After his burial, outside the city, large numbers came to the spot and sang hymns over his sepulchre. This oil has ever since been superstitiously venerated both by Christians and Moslems as a holy relic of miraculous power. The martyrdom of St. Demetrius is said to have taken place on October 26, 302. There has always been a tradition that St. Paul preached in a subterranean church at Thessalonica, over which the cathedral dedicated to the above Christian martyr was subsequently erected,

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and which eventually became the Mosque of St. Demetrius.

In the important Greek document discovered at Pergamos, Demetrius is found to be associated with a champion or defender, who soon after met his own death under the same tyrants. It seems hardly likely that this champion could have been other than St. George himself, though not described by that name. It must be taken into consideration that, at that period, every one of noble birth or distinguished position had a second name given him, either after some great person in the history of his own country or from some personal quality or peculiarity. Only one name for the time, however, was ever adopted, and that might be either the prenomen, which was given to boys on the ninth day of their birth (if a Christian, the baptismal name), or the subsequent cognomen or surname. On canonisation the prenomen or baptismal name was always given, even when the surname was used during life. It is pretty clear from the Greek manuscript that the second name of St. George was "Nestor" (Lat. *Nestorius*)—*Ὁ θεῖος Νέστωρ*, as in this composition. After the martyrdom of Demetrius it describes this "Nestor" as the champion, going direct to the monarch and boldly accusing

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him. The autocrat ordered him to fetch the body of Demetrius, which had been forcibly removed by his followers from Thessalonica to the outskirts, and was being visited by large numbers on account of miraculous fire coming out of the tomb, which greatly alarmed the authorities. "Nestor" refused, and instead put on his armour, raised a number of men, waged war against the idols, and destroyed the Temple of Bacchus, of course at the imminent risk of his own life. Even now there still lie in this city the ruins of the Propyleum and the figure of Bacchus with a panther at his feet. Though severely wounded by spears this champion rapidly fled from Thessalonica, and for a short time escaped from his enemies. There, in seclusion, we must leave him for a few months until he had recovered from his dangerous wounds.

The document then goes on to describe this "divine Nestor" as having given light, together with the revered Demetrius, and having done away with the darkness of falsehood, each in turn losing his life through very firmly anathematising idols. After the exciting events in Thessalonica, their faithful followers, who had been saved, sang loudly :

" Rejoice, Demetrius, in thy firm support.  
Rejoice, O Nestor, in thy shining splendour.  
Rejoice, strength having been granted to Nestor.

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Rejoice, destruction having been brought on Bacchus.

Rejoice, thou first one, having exposed the infatuation of the tyrant.

Rejoice, thou second one, having approved the example of the former.

Rejoice thou in the spears, having expected death.

Rejoice thou in the sword, having procured life eternal.

Rejoice, Martyr Demetrius."

Then it records that each of this "holy pair of martyrs" (*τῶν μαρτύρων ἡ δὺὰς ἡ ἀγία*), when about to be transferred from this present world, delivered himself firmly with a loud voice as a resolute martyr, whereat those looking on were awestruck. The "orthodox martyr," wishing to save the race from the error of vain idols, spontaneously went to the foolish tyrant and impostor himself, and proclaimed the Lord as the only true God.

Here he is specially designated *Ἀθλοφόρος* ("the victorious one" or "victor"), the very title of distinction which the Greek Church had always given to St. George.

"Thou, O victor and martyr, art the stronghold of victors and of all thy followers; having publicly proclaimed the Maker of heaven and earth thou hast degraded both the tyrant and the idols, and we cry loudly to thee :

" Rejoice, supplying fortitude to the weak.

Rejoice, securing deliverance by thy blood-shedding.

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Rejoice, bringing all joy to those celebrating thee in song.  
Rejoice, substituting divine things for idols by thy power.  
Rejoice because thou hast shed thy blood, as it were a  
baptism.

Rejoice because thou hast submitted thy body to death.  
Rejoice as a tower shining to a celestial height."

Many other details in prose and poetical choruses are given ; and the document thus ends : " O ye pair of martyrs, having to all proclaimed God the Eternal Word, now that ye have accepted our final hymnal odes, shield us from every disaster, and from our destined punishment ransom us, in our prayers calling loudly to God, Alleluia."

In confirmation of what has been stated as to this " divine Nestor " being identical with St. George, it may be mentioned that there is attached to the last page of this Greek manuscript a large impression of an ancient seal, on which St. George is clearly depicted on horseback and clad in armour, with a lance killing a prostrate man, the personification of Paganism. The dragon was a still later introduction into the legend. As far as can be made out of the ancient Greek inscription around, most of which is illegible, it reads  
*Μαρτυρος Δημητριου . . Ονητεις . . . . N.C.T.<sup>1</sup> . . .*  
—The armoured Saint on horseback could not

<sup>1</sup> These are three Greek capital letters, C being the ancient form of the letter S.

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have been intended for St. Demetrius, who was a  
Presbyter and President of the Church of Thessalonica,  
and who in Christian art was never depicted with a  
lance as his emblem. H

This important document also effectually disposes  
of the fiction that this same "Nestor" challenged a  
celebrated gladiator named *Lyoeus* at Thessalonica,  
and killed him with one blow before the Emperor  
himself. *Αβαϊος* (*Lyoeus*) was really a Greek word for  
Bacchus, whose image and temple "Nestor" destroyed,  
as fully described in the manuscript. Even in the  
"Acta Sanctorum" this fiction is given as if it had  
been a fact, though at the same time it expressly  
mentions that "Nestor" sprang from the higher grades  
of life, and it attributes to him equally with Demetrius  
the possession of miraculous powers. It may here  
be stated as a significant fact that in a subsequent  
chapter on the same subject in "Acta Sanctorum,"  
probably written at a much later period, Demetrius is  
associated with St. George, and no mention is made of  
"Nestor." Again, in speaking of Christian martyrs, it  
specifies SS. Georgius, Theodorus, and Demetrius  
as *ductores* or chiefs; and in another passage, Georgius,  
Demetrius, and Mauritius (who appears to have been  
a lay ruler of the Church of Thessalonica). apollo - H

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But now we must pass on to the last scene in the life of St. George, who had recovered from the wounds he recently received at Thessalonica (in October, 302), and had braced himself up for a final effort in the cause he had taken in hand. It would appear that as regards Nicomedia, the eastern and principal capital of Diocletian, and his chief residence, this Emperor had purposely avoided or delayed issuing the edict of persecution against the Christians until now, when Galerius, having joined him there, induced him to do so.

According to Rev. S. Baring-Gould, in his "Lives of the Saints," on the subject of St. George, Eusebius of Caesarea (whose appropriated surname during life was Pamphili) says (Hist. Eccles. viii. 5): "Immediately on the promulgation of the edict, a certain man of no mean origin, but highly esteemed for his temporal dignities, as soon as the decree was published against the Churches in Nicomedia, stimulated by a divine zeal, and excited by an ardent faith, took it as it was openly placed and posted up for public inspection, and tore it to shreds as a most profane and wicked act. This, too, was done when the two Caesars were in the city, the first of whom was the eldest and chief of all, the other held the fourth grade of the imperial dignity after him. But this man, as the first that was distin-



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guished there in this manner, after enduring what was likely to follow an act so daring, preserved his mind calm and serene, until the moment when his spirit fled." All this, of course, has direct reference to the great St. George, as shown by Papebroeck, although, strangely enough, no name is given by Eusebius. There are various traditional accounts, mixed up with fable, as to the mode of death of St. George. At first he was almost killed by spear thrusts, but miraculously recovered. Whilst suffering from other tortures he is said to have performed miracles, and to the last moment conducted himself with much calmness and fortitude. This was on April 23, 303.

In the 9th century Simeon Metaphrastes wrote, in Latin, a Life of St. George, which for a time was greatly appreciated and considered trustworthy ; but it contains much that is fabulous and erroneous. I have had the privilege of seeing a copy in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. The martyr is wrongly designated in it St. George of Cappadocia, and this error has been copied by other Latin writers on the subject. It is not improbable that St. George's father (we know not his name) had been a native of Cappadocia (where at that period there were numerous Christians), or at least that he had sprung from a noble

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Cappadocian family, and this would account for the persistence of so many in thus designating St. George who was undoubtedly born at Lydda in Palestine (see Appendix) ; and even those writers who call him Cappadocian agree that his mother was a native of Palestine. Under no circumstances, however, must our St. George be confounded with George, the Arian Bishop of Alexandria, of half a century later.

Simeon Metaphrastes describes St. George as having been born of noble and wealthy Christian parents, and as having lost his father during his childhood. He entered the Roman army, and soon became a tribune and a special favourite of the Emperor Diocletian. Other particulars may perhaps be relied on, such for instance as the quotation from Eusebius in his *Life of Constantine the Great* (bk. 2, Cap. 48) informing us that urgent representations had been made by the Augurs to Diocletian to the effect that through the influence of the Christians no proper results of divination were any longer to be obtained, and the oracle of Apollo made great complaint. From this time Diocletian both feared and hated the Christians and was the more readily persuaded to issue his edict of persecution. Simeon then describes how St. George indignantly tore down the edict

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at Nicomedia and thus addressed himself to Diocletian and the Senate : “ How long, most noble Emperor, and you, Conscript Fathers, will you continue to increase your tyrannies against Christians ? How long will you persevere in enacting cruel and unjust laws against them, endeavouring to compel those who are properly instructed in the true faith to follow a religion of the truth of which you yourselves are doubtful ? Your idols are not gods : I repeat it, they are not ! Be no longer deceived by your errors. Our Christ alone is God. He alone is Lord, in the glory of the Father.” The sequel is well known, though the particulars of the exact mode of martyrdom vary, and many fabulous accounts of tortures inflicted and miracles performed have been given.

It is strange that the Latin versions should have given A.D. 290 as the year of St. George's death, when he could have only just reached the 21st year of his age, for Diocletian did not issue his edict of persecution until after the commencement of the fourth century. These Roman Catholic versions also express a strong belief in all the miracles attributed to St. George both during his life and martyrdom, and after his death.

Perhaps the most important and interesting

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documents in the Bodleian Library relating to this subject are two very ancient copies of a Greek manuscript by Pasirates, the confidential servant of St. George, whose sufferings during his martyrdom and last wishes he faithfully describes.

As to these documents, the reference in the Library is Codex Baroccianus 147 ; No. 9. S. Georgii Martyrium, Auctore Pasirate famulo, fol. 153.

The title (in Greek) is "The Martyrdom of the holy and universally -esteemed great - martyr and trophy-bearer George." The translation of the commencement is "Of, indeed, our Saviour Jesus Christ." . . . There are altogether eighteen good sized pages, each with two columns. I endeavoured to carefully examine them, but it must be confessed the archaic characters of the Greek writing are so difficult to decipher that it took me hours to go through part of one column. Of the two Greek copies the older, on vellum, of about the end of the twelfth century, is in a clear cursive hand, but defaced in parts and lacks the beginning. The other copy is on paper of the fifteenth century, in a very clear cursive hand, and in good preservation. There is a remarkable confirmation of the intimate association of St. George with St. Demetrius in the fact that out of thirty sections in

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the above volume, giving the lives of other saints, as Chrysostom, Epiphanius, Cyril, etc., the one (No. 10) which immediately follows St. George is that of St. Demetrius. It is entitled (in Greek)—“The martyrdom of the holy and universally-esteemed great-martyr, the Myroblete and wonder-working Demetrius.” There are thirteen pages or twenty-six columns.

It is evident that the narrative of Pasicrates was in no sense intended as a life of St. George, but seemed chiefly to be a full account of all his sufferings as a martyr, and of his last wishes before his death.

A very interesting fact, in corroboration of St. George being a native of Lydda, even if genealogically a Cappadocian, is that his last injunction to his trusted servant was that he should arrange for the interment of his remains at Lydda in Palestine, where he had spent all his childhood with his mother, to whom he had always been so devotedly attached. This Pasicrates promised to do, and stated that it was at the seventh hour on April 23 that St. George died.

Thus passed away this “Great Martyr” and “Trophy-bearer”—this wise tribune, and most faithful and unselfish Christian soldier—this “Victorious One” and once Court favourite. But the remembrance of him is unfading, and his fame has extended through-

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out the whole world. His remains were permitted to be laid to rest in Nicomedia, no doubt through the influence of Diocletian, who must have suffered much remorse at having been the cause of the death of his best and truest subject. Here this "Holy Martyr" would rest in peace for about twenty-five years, until removed to his native Lydda.

Diocletian abdicated in 305. Galerius, when dying of a loathsome disease, in 311, issued a decree of toleration. On the death of Constantius at York, in 306, his son Constantine was proclaimed his successor, who, although he soon decreed toleration for the Christians, did not actually profess Christianity until 326, when he urged all his subjects to embrace that religion. Such were the indirect fruits of the life of St. George. Now would be the time for the definite canonization of this noble martyr, and henceforth he would be known throughout the world as "St. George the Martyr," by whatever name he might have been known during life. Now, too, would be the time for the removal of his remains from Nicomedia to his native Lydda in Palestine. Constantine would readily give permission for this removal, which would also be promoted by the Empress Helena and by Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea and great historian. Eusebius

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was himself born in Palestine about 264, and was imprisoned there for two years during the persecution by Diocletian. He became Bishop of Caesarea in 313, at which time the Bishop of Lydda was subject to Caesarea ; and died in 340. He has been called the father of ecclesiastical history, and is said to have been most judicious, moderate, and truthful. Constantine said he was fit to be the Bishop of the whole world. He wrote an Ecclesiastical History in ten books, containing records of studies in numerous libraries, Constantine allowing him to have all documents relating to the history of martyrs ; also a special treatise on the "Martyrs of Palestine." It could hardly have been other than he who was the original author of the beautiful and pathetic account (above described) of the martyrdom of Demetrius and his fellow Saint, whom he also designated *ἡρέμαχος* ("champion" or "defender"). The account by Eusebius which has been already quoted had reference only to the closing scenes in the life of St. George ; but some of the expressions in it are identical with those in the Pergamos manuscript, such as "stimulated by a divine zeal," and "excited by an ardent faith."

Before describing the removal of the remains of this saintly martyr it would be well that we should

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consider that period of his life when he must have accompanied Galerius during the memorable campaign in Persian Armenia, for it is only by his conduct and generalship in that great war that he could have acquired so famous a reputation as a soldier, and received such titles as the "victorious" and "trophy-bearer." A further and important clue, showing the identity of St. George with the "divine Nestor," in connection with the very region where Nestorianism took its rise, has been afforded by an interesting article written at Urmi in Armenia, and signed O.H.P., on "Some Customs of the Eastern Syrians," in the "Assyrian Mission Quarterly Paper" (July, 1901), published by S.P.C.K. Urmi or Urumiah, a Persian town, was originally the home of Magianism and Astrology, and is said to have been the birthplace of Zoroaster. It has long been the seat of a Nestorian bishop.

It is stated in this Quarterly Paper that the Church of Mar Sergis (Sergius was an ancient Nestorian ecclesiastic and Patron Saint of Urumiah), on a hill outside the town, is a famous place of pilgrimage, and contains a crypt where lunatics are confined for healing. "This church is perhaps the most famous in Urmi: but there are others. *The many Churches of St. George* (Mar Giwergis) are resorted to by sufferers



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from fever and quaking and fear.” It says also there is a widely-spread belief that it is good to be baptized at one of these famous churches, especially on its festival day. Again, from the gate of Urmi, halfway to the mountain on which is the church of Mar Sergis (where they offer a sheep, to be slain in the churchyard), is a sacred rosebush, the single yellow Persian kind, covering some fifty square yards, and visible miles away, making the whole air around heavy with scent. The Blessed Virgin, St. George, and the Old Testament Saints, are represented as “Aiders in Council.”

Both the Persians and the Romans had long been desirous of taking possession of the province of Armenia, and Diocletian is said by Vaux (“Ancient History of Persia”) to have taken up his abode at Antioch, in order to direct the whole force of his Empire against the Persian ruler, while the command of the legions was given to the intrepid Galerius. After three battles the army of Galerius was totally defeated, and Galerius, in great disgrace, returned to Diocletian. But soon afterwards a second army was collected, and Galerius again crossed the Euphrates, and, avoiding the heats of the plain countries by clinging to the friendly mountains of Armenia, secured in this way ground specially favourable for his most

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important arm, the infantry. These plans were crowned with success. A night attack surprised the Persians with their horses tied up, and ended in the total defeat of Narses. A long stay would now be made by the Roman army in this region until Diocletian could be sent for, and both Emperors arrange with the Persian ambassador a treaty which it was hoped would secure peace for many years. The treaty, at length signed, ceded to Rome Mesopotamia and the Mountains of Carduchi (now Kurdistan); at the same time the boundaries of the Kingdom of Armenia were restored and enlarged. Tiridates the Great was allowed to return to his ancestral throne in Armenia, of course under the Roman Empire. The Emperors afterwards celebrated at Rome their successes, and those of their lieutenants (whom the jealous Emperors never allowed to be mentioned by name) by a triumph, the last that Rome ever witnessed.

During the long stay in Persian Armenia (the principal town of its chief province being Urmi or Urumiah), the noble Christian soldier St. George—the victorious trophy-bearer—the saintly Nestor—would have ample time to organize and energize the Christian community which he would rejoice to find there. These Assyrian Christians (as they described

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themselves) were said to have been early converted to Christianity by the teaching of the Apostles Bartholomew and Thomas, and by two of the seventy disciples. To the present day this special community of Armenian Christians believe themselves to be the descendants of the two and a half tribes (Reubenites, Gadites, and half tribe of Manasseh), who were carried into captivity as recorded in 1 Chronicles v. 26. From time immemorial they have been persecuted, and many of them ruthlessly slaughtered, by the savage enemies surrounding them, such as the Parthians and subsequently the wild Kurds. The Apostle Bartholomew is said to have met with his martyrdom in this part of Armenia, having been flayed alive, and then crucified with his head downwards, in A.D. 71.

Some years ago a deputation of two Nestorian chiefs arrived in London with letters of introduction to the Archbishop of Canterbury. With one of them, Deacon Abraham, I had several conversations, and from him received several letters. The doctrines of this special and original Nestorian Church have always been very pure, and free from the errors which crept into other Christian Churches, even those of the Armenians amongst whom they lived, especially those who designated themselves "Chaldean Christians." It

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must have been from the St. George Nestorius, and not the Nestorius of a century and a half later, that they took the name Nestorian, for what would be less likely than that these poor and illiterate men, holding the most simple doctrines and practices of the early Christians, should trouble themselves with the highly abstruse and disputatious subjects about the Virgin Mother and the nature and essence of Christ, which were so painfully connected with the time of the second Nestorius in a far-off land? The latter was banished, first to Petra, and afterwards to Upper Egypt, and his few followers soon became extinct throughout the Roman Empire, in no part of which they were allowed to remain, although some, perhaps, became scattered in such distant lands as India and Arabia. None could go to Armenia. But the two sects may afterwards have been in some way historically confounded and mixed up together, just as Gibbon so wrongly confounded the two St. Georges. The true Nestorians, who were originally sons of Israel and not Gentiles, have always clung to their original locality: "Nestorians occupying the mountains of the Persian frontier, and speaking a Syrian dialect; Georgians in the north." And we are made to believe that these primitive Christians, holding a pure

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faith, and leading a secluded life in their mountain fastnesses, suddenly became followers of Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, on most difficult points of doctrine ! When the proceedings connected with this Nestorius of the fifth century became known to them, by the heads of their Church, they at once raised objections, and even wished to forego the name of Nestorians altogether, so steadfast were they in the simple and holy faith they had always professed.

It is interesting to note that, some time after the end of the war between the Romans and Persians, Tiridates was converted to Christianity by St. Gregory the "Illuminator," and Armenia became henceforward the bulwark of Christianity in Asia. There are about one million and a quarter Armenians in Armenia itself and Persia, and about an equal number elsewhere. The Nestorians (as we may still call them), living in their midst in Armenia, are estimated to number only 70,000 souls. They are still a poor and guileless race, though hardy and brave. As Christians they are as simple-minded as ever, even if in some things slightly superstitious.

This St. Gregory, surnamed "Illuminator," was consecrated Bishop and Head of the Armenian Church early in the fourth century, and erected a great number

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of churches, monasteries, hospitals, and schools. This would be during the reign of Constantine the Great, when he who during his life had been called the "divine Nestor" was canonized as St. George, to whom these Nestorian Churches seem to have been dedicated.

If it was not this St. George who founded the true Nestorians, how else are we to account for the fact that even up to the present day there are to be found at Urmi, their headquarters, *the many Churches of St. George*, including that of the Nestorian Sergius, to which sufferers went in case of fear or great distress ; also a crypt for the confinement and cure of lunatics ; that St. George is represented as an Aider in Council ; and lastly that sheep are sacrificed to his memory ?—all which actions, as we have noted, take place even now in Palestine, in connexion with those who believe in and honour St. George.

The sacred rosebush in the midst of these ancient Churches of St. George at Urmi would also seem to show that this flower has always been dedicated to him.

In corroboration of what has been advanced in these remarks on the life of St. George, an important paper was recently read (April 29, 1901) at the

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Royal Geographical Society by Major Maunsell, R.A., on central Kurdistân. The President described it as bearing on a very interesting part of Asia, and one of which they have had no account for at least the last forty years, and many parts of which are still unknown.

The following are a few extracts relating to our subject :—

“ Mukus (South of Lake Van) is a compact district with many Kurd and Christian villages in seven small valleys radiating from the main one, and was the ancient Roman province of Moxene, which name is still preserved in its present title. . . .

“ In a gorge near Shattakh is the celebrated Armenian monastery which contains the tomb of Tiridates. . . .

“ The centre of this curious plain of Gavar, near the River Zab (a mountain torrent between rocky walls) is occupied by several Nestorian villages, which cultivate the fertile soil, while the interests of the Kurds in the villages around are chiefly pastoral. . . .

“ In the Berwari valley are six villages of Nestorian Christians. Below this is the valley of Kochannes, the village of this name being interesting as the residence of Mar Shimun, the patriarch of the

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Nestorian Christians. (There are excellent illustrations both of Kochannes, the residence of Mar Shimun, and also of a group of Nestorian Christians.) . . .”

Many other Christian and Kurd villages are spoken of.

“On the left bank of the Zab, Des is the first of the Nestorian Christian valleys, each of which comprises a little community or canton by itself under its own Malik, the spiritual head being the patriarch, Mar Shimun. . . .

“The valleys below Sewin (the southern part) complete all the districts of the Nestorian Christians. . . .

“Quite at the head of the valley of Des, on a rocky cliff, is *the tiny Church of Mar Gewergis, or Saint George*, in which a service is only held once a year, on the saint’s name day. It is situated just north of the fine Jelu Mountains, on the south of which is the Christian district of Greater Jelu. Around this are other Christian districts. . . .

“In the southernmost part of this region of Central Kurdistân is the ‘Jews’ River,’ near which still reside many Jews, whose predecessors have been there for centuries, and appear to have been refugees from ancient Nineveh (the modern Mosul), and, if their history could be traced, would be found quite as



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interesting as that of the Nestorians themselves. . . .”

In the discussion which followed the reading of this paper, Earl Percy (who had twice been to Kurdistân) congratulated the author on having described almost all the main districts of the Nestorian country. His own opinion, however, was that the Jews who resided near the “Jews’ River” were not refugees from Nineveh, but descendants of some of the original settlers who were transferred there after the fall of Samaria (as described in 2 Kings xvii. 6).

The President, in thanking Major Maunsell for his interesting paper, spoke of the extraordinary historical interest connected with this region. Sir Henry Rawlinson had expressed his opinion that it was here where the Ark rested, and not the peak in Armenia, the honours of which are only derived from a much more modern tradition. The country is also extremely interesting from the march of Xenophon through it after he left the valley of the Tigris; and what is of the deepest interest connected with it is the history of *the marches that were made across it in the times of the Eastern Emperors.*

Layard, in his book on “Nineveh and Babylon,” gave an excellent account of the Nestorians and their numerous villages in this part of Kurdistân, Lake

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Van being on the north, Lake Urumiah on the east, and Mosul with the ruins of Nineveh on the Tigris on the west. As to this Nestorian region it is certainly remarkable that *in the north*, near Lake Van, Layard describes in the large valley of Narek *a church dedicated to St. George*, much frequented in pilgrimage by the Christians of Van and the surrounding country.

*Layard's 2.* | *In the west* he also marks prominently in his map *the Convent of St. George*, close to the ruins of Nineveh on the Tigris. As regards the word "convent," he explains elsewhere that the Nestorians have no establishment answering to Roman Catholic places of retirement, and that monastic vows are not taken by them. *In the east*, at Urumiah, which may be looked upon as the headquarters of the Nestorians, it has already been noticed that there are *many churches dedicated to St. George*. And *in the centre*, as Major Maunsell has shown, there is the *Church of St. George*, in which service is held once a year on this Saint's name day.

It can hardly be otherwise than that the "divine Nestor" or Nestorius who had organized these primitive Christians into a distinct religious community was the true St. George, as already explained.

We come now to the last stage of all—the removal

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of the remains of this Saint from the seat of his martyrdom to his last resting-place. This removal would be readily promoted by Constantine, who built a church in his honour at Byzantium, now called Constantinople. It is, perhaps, not difficult to trace the course by sea of the funeral procession. Nicomedia was situated at the eastern extremity of the Propontis (now Sea of Marmora). After proceeding along the Propontis the vessel would pass through the Hellespont (now Dardanelles), which thence for a long period was known as "St. George's Arm." It would then be sure to call at Thessalonica the "Orthodox City," where the "Orthodox Martyr" was provoked beyond endurance by witnessing the extreme severities towards the Christians and the martyrdom of Demetrius. Here a fine church dedicated to St. George was now erected, as well as one to Demetrius, who became the patron Saint of Thessalonica. The Church of St. George was built in a circular form, and its dome covered with fine mosaics, which were spoilt greatly when the church (then a mosque) was "restored" in 1889. From Thessalonica the remains would be conveyed along the Aegean Sea, passing the south-eastern point of Thessaly, known to this day as "St. George's Cape," then by the Island of Scyros, where on its east coast

*Thessalonica*

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*Island of Cyprus*  
*Beirut*  
*Church*  
is the town of St. George (where perhaps refuge was taken from stress of weather), and then continuing straight on to Beirût, already described as a most picturesque city on the coast of Syria at the south side of the beautiful sweep of "St. George's Bay." Of this place and neighbourhood, Dr. Thomson, in his "Land and the Book," says that neither pen nor pencil can do justice. The majority of the population at Beirût were Christians, and are so at the present day. There then would be great excitement and mourning, and extreme reverence would be paid to the remains of this well-known noble Christian martyr. Churches were built in honour of him in all directions. Just over the Lebanon was an important one at Caesarea Philippi. It was erected on the ledge of a rock on the western slope of Mount Hermon, where it remains to this day, and is revered by Moslems as well as by Christians. Formerly, on this same rock, there had been temples built successively to Baal, Pan, and Caesar, all which had been overthrown by earthquakes. Other similar churches to St. George were erected beyond Antilebanon even as far as Edhra in the Haurân.

From Beirût the funeral route would be by sea to Joppa, and then by land to Lydda, only nine miles

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off. Here, in his beloved Sharon birthplace, the most verdant spot in all Palestine, lie the mortal remains of this most celebrated man—the “Evergreen Green One” in the memories of us all. With us, indeed, his highest and most appropriate emblem might well be “The Rose of Sharon.”

Over his grave a magnificent church was built by Constantine the Great, and is said to have been restored by Justinian about 540. For many centuries the town was known by no other name than that of “St. George’s.” King Richard I of England spent much time there, and rebuilt the church, the ruins of which still remain and have an air of grandeur.<sup>1</sup> England, as we so well know, adopted St. George of Lydda as her Patron.

At the Crusades he was looked upon as a soldier Saint who led his votaries to battle, and many miraculous appearances were credited to him. It is traditionally recorded that to the English and to the Norman leaders of English forces he proved himself very gracious, for in 1089, when the Christians were very hard pressed, St. George appeared in a vision of the night to Robert, Duke of Normandy, and the next day both St. George and St. Demetrius descended from

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

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the hills in flashing armour and harassed the enemy, with the result that victory inclined to the Crusaders. Similar accounts are given in Roberts' "History of the First Crusades," written in 1120; and also by William of Malmesbury, who relates the appearance of SS. George and Demetrius at the siege of Antioch. It is said, too, that St. George also took Richard Cœur-de-Lion under his especial protection in the Holy Land, with the result that the English king and the knights began to call upon him always in battle. In 1349 Edward III instituted the Order of the Garter under the patronage of this Saint, but until the time of Edward VI it was always called the Order of St. George. We must not forget, too, the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George, which was instituted in 1818.

In art St. George appears armed as a knight, mounted on a horse, and transfixing the dragon with his lance. On the gold coins of Victoria and Edward VII he is about to slay the wounded dragon with a sword, a broken lance being on the ground.

It is a remarkable fact, which has never been sufficiently noticed, that St. George and St. Demetrius have been strangely linked together as a "holy pair of martyrs." It was so, as just described, in the way they

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were supposed to miraculously aid the Crusaders in their battles. The chief churches (now mosques) in Thessalonica were built in honour of, and dedicated to, these two. In Jerusalem, too, the ancient churches and convents of these same are in close proximity, as recently explained by Dr. Conrad Schick, in a very interesting paper, with plan, in the Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement of July, 1900. When the Christians took possession of Jerusalem in 1099 these buildings, which were Byzantine, already existed there, and at that time bore the name of St. George only, but were afterwards divided into two, St. George and St. Demetrius. Tobler, even as late as 1853, describes in his "Topography of Jerusalem" this very building as one "in a fine situation, having two churches, Demetrius and St. George."

In a letter which I received from Dr. Schick<sup>1</sup> he states that besides this there are two other ancient St. George Churches, or pilgrim houses of the Greeks, in Jerusalem, as well as a further one in the west outside Jerusalem with marvellous rock caves. In one of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Conrad Schick, the eminent architect, has since died at Jerusalem, where he had resided more than half a century, and was an ardent investigator of the Holy City, which made him the very greatest authority on the subject of ancient and modern Jerusalem. He had many orders conferred upon him.

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them is now to be seen a dark cell where insane people were brought and bound in iron chains (which are still fixed to the wall) to become cured by St. George. In addition to these there is the modern Church of St. George the Martyr.

Did the Empress Helena accompany the state funeral procession from Nicomedia to the Holy Land? It is more than probable that she did, for it was exactly at that date that she went to Jerusalem, Lydda being on the direct road from Joppa. Instructions would have been given by her for the erection of the Byzantine Church and buildings described by Dr. Schick, situated as they were very near the Holy Sepulchre, which Helena is reputed to have discovered.

It is to be hoped that the real life and history of St. George, "Victor and Martyr," will still be found in some explorations—it may be at Pergamos, or Nicomedia, or Constantinople, or Thessalonica; though, as regards the last-named place, any records that might have been there would probably have been destroyed in the great fire of September, 1890, when all the archives were burnt. But, as this treatise shows, it might be necessary to seek the true history of this Christian Saint, not as George, but under



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another name, by which he was called and known during life. As yet we only know him by his baptismal and canonized name.

ALL HONOUR TO THIS TUTELARY SAINT OF  
OLD ENGLAND !  
MAY THE ENGLISH RACE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD  
CONTINUE TO REVERE HIS MEMORY AS OF YORE,  
AND EVER FLOURISH UNDER THAT  
RED CROSS BANNER  
WHICH IS THE SYMBOL OF OUR PATRIOTISM !  
MAY NOT WE ALL CRY FERVENTLY, IN IMITATION  
OF WHAT WAS PUT INTO THE MOUTH OF  
HENRY V BY THE IMMORTAL SHAKESPEARE,  
“ GOD FOR EDWARD, ENGLAND, AND ST. GEORGE ! ”



## **Appendix**



## Appendix

With regard to Lydda being the birthplace as well as the burial-place of the true St. George, it may be of interest to quote the following authorities, all of whom have visited the spot :—

SIR WILLIAM SMITH (" Dictionary of the Bible " : 3 vols.).

The article on Lydda by SIR GEORGE GROVE.

" St. George, the patron Saint of England, *was a native of Lydda*. After his martyrdom *his remains were buried there* (see quotations by Robinson, ii. 245), and over them a church was afterwards built and dedicated to his honour. . . . The remains of the church still form the most remarkable object in the modern village. . . . As the city of St. George, who is one with the famous personage El-Khudr, Lydda is held in much honour by the Muslims."

SIR CHARLES WILSON (" Picturesque Palestine " : 4 large vols.).

" We see in front of us the beautiful ruins of Lydda, the city of our patron Saint, St. George, held in honour both by Muhammedans and Christians. The church, the ruins of which were until lately so picturesque, has passed through many vicissitudes. As early as A.D. 315 we know it to have existed here, the site of a bishopric, and dedicated to St. George, whose remains are said to be interred beneath." (There is an excellent engraving of the ruins of this church of St. George at Lydda.)

## Appendix

REV. ANDREW THOMSON, D.D. (" In the Holy Land ").

" Lydda—embosomed in the midst of rich gardens, whose undying fruitfulness no neglect can entirely repress. . . . To Englishmen this little Sharon village has, besides, another kind of interest, *as being the birthplace, and containing the tomb*, of St. George, the tutelary Saint of England, whose famous legend, as trampling on the Dragon, has, after an interval of some reigns, been restored on certain of our English coins."

MR. HEPWORTH DIXON (" The Holy Land ").

" Lydda, the bright little town of many names—the Hebrew Lod, the Greek Lydda, the Roman Diospolis, the Frank St. George, the Arab Lud . . . made the seat of a Jewish College, of a Roman Court, and of a Christian bishop; *honoured by the birth and burial of St. George*; adorned by Justinian; captured by the Saracens; retaken by the Crusaders; destroyed by Saladin; garrisoned by Lion Heart. Perhaps the most singular event in its strange history was its division by Richard and Saladin into two parts, a Christian side and a Moslem side, in which it was agreed that under the protection of St. George, a martial and heroic Saint, worthy to be the patron of gallant men, the English Knight and his Saracenic foe, a foe no longer, should dwell in peace and charity with each other. . . . England adopted St. George of Lydda as her patron, and the Saracens not only continued to respect the Frankish Church, but added to their own calendar the name of our English Saint.

" For many years after the last Crusader had retired from Lydda, the Christian Church was kept in repair by English funds. . . . In spite of its Arab charms, Lydda will always present itself to the imagination *as an English place. Under these palms and myrtles St. George, the lord of chivalry and courtesy, was born.* . . . And how have we

## Appendix

treated our warlike Saint ? In a way to make a Moham-  
medan flush with ire. . . . The St. George of our common  
books was a low fellow ; born in a shop in an obscure pro-  
vincial town ; who rose from a servile condition by the arts  
of a parasite ; who sold swine-flesh to the army, and made  
money by frauds on the treasury ; who fled away from  
justice, joining the sect of Arians in Egypt, and becoming  
Archbishop of Alexandria ; who cast into prison all men  
differing from himself in belief ; who robbed the merchants,  
played the part of informer and spy, and was at length most  
justly murdered by his own people, exposed in the public  
streets of Alexandria, and cast like a dead cur into the sea:  
But the true St. George of the Calendar, the true St. George  
of England, was another man. . . . Above the grave of  
St. George of Lydda a church was built in very early times,  
some say so early as by Justinian ; a convent grew up  
beside it ; and for many years the town itself was known to  
Crusading Knights by no other name than that of St.  
George." (There is an excellent illustration of St. George's  
Church at Lydda, from a photograph by Graham.)

W. M. THOMSON, D.D. (" The Land and the Book " ).

" We are now approaching the orchards of Lydd, that  
village where St. Peter was when summoned to Jaffa on  
account of the death of Dorcas. Its greatest celebrity  
however, is derived from St. George, who is said to have  
been *both born and buried there*. Dr. Robinson has given  
an excellent description of the church as its ruins now  
are. . . . No one will examine the remains of the church  
without being impressed with a certain air of grandeur  
which it wears. Lydd is a flourishing village of some 2,000  
inhabitants. . . . From the earliest ages of the church  
to the present hour it has been frequented by pilgrims, and  
during the Crusades it was specially honoured on account of  
St. George."

BUTLER & TANNER,  
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,  
FROME, AND LONDON.